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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0759
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC 2720
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000067

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/S/IHB, HHS FOR OGHA STEIGER, BHAT AND ABDOO;
FAS/OSTA HAMILTON, BEAN; FAS/OCRA RADLER, BEILLARD,
FAS/OFSO BREHM; APHIS/IS CAPLEN; APHIS/VS JAMES-PRESTON,
ISAAC;
USTR FOR STRATFORD AND ALTBACH
USDOC FOR 3132/USFCS/OIO/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [TSPL](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [KSQA](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: H5N2 OUTBREAK TESTS TAIWAN'S PREPAREDNESS TO
COMBAT BIRD FLU

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A low-pathogenic H5N2 virus outbreak, discovered on a Kaohsiung chicken farm in October 2008, but not reported for two months, underscores the need for transparency at the Council of Agriculture (COA) regarding virus outbreaks among poultry and animals. The authorities' slow response has generated concern from the public and the health community, although test results show that the virus was of low pathogenicity. On December 20, following tests confirming the H5N2 virus as a low-pathogenic type, Taiwan then notified the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) of the findings. However, pending completed tests on the 76 chicken farms to prove it is virus-free, Taiwan remains on the H5N2 Avian Influenza list of OIE, and Japan has banned Taiwan poultry imports. The incident has hurt public trust in the ability of the authorities to keep it informed of virus outbreaks, and has dealt the poultry industry a heavy blow. END SUMMARY

PUBLIC NOT NOTIFIED OF OUTBREAK

12. (SBU) On January 14, ESTHoff met with COA's Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine office (BAPHIQ) to get an update on the H5N2 bird flu outbreak. According to COA, on October 21, three dead chickens were found at the Luchu poultry farm in Kaohsiung. The farm's owners notified the Kaohsiung County Animal Disease Control Center to conduct sampling and testing. On October 23, the county sent experts to inspect 76 poultry farms within a three kilometer radius, and a movement ban was imposed on chickens from one poultry farm to another. From October 21 to November 7, 230 chickens out of a population of 18,000 died from the H5N2 virus; a death rate not unusual for a population of that size. COA officials told us that the dead chickens were first tested on November 12, and results indicated a high pathogenic strain of H5N2. However, the low rate of mortality made them skeptical of this initial test, and further testing was scheduled. (Note: In 2004, a low-pathogenic H5N2 outbreak affected many chicken farms in central Taiwan, and the mortality rate was much higher). No press statements were issued at this stage, and the public was unaware of the outbreak. COA officials told us they did not release any information on the outbreak because test results were not yet available, and that it takes from 19-40 days to complete standard testing procedures.

JAPAN BANS TAIWAN POULTRY IMPORTS

13. (SBU) On November 14, all 18,000 birds at the Luchu poultry farm, where the initial outbreak took place, were destroyed. On December 17, the media broke the story, resulting in a public outcry and to Japan's banning Taiwan poultry imports the same day. Since Taiwan exports about 5,000 tons of ducks to Japan (90 percent of its duck meat exports), the economic loss from the ban is estimated at more than NT 1 billion (USD 3 million). On December 20, a second test on live-but-sickly chickens at the Luchu farm finally confirmed that the H5N2 was of low pathogenicity. On that day, COA officially notified OIE of the results. OIE requires a member to be placed in "AI free status" only after a 90-day zero-AI infection period. To comply with this requirement, COA officials said COA would have to take 40 samples from each of the 76 poultry farms from December to February and show negative results. If and when that occurs, COA will then request that Taiwan be taken off the list of H5N2-affected jurisdictions. Only then will Japan allow Taiwan poultry to be imported again.

COMMENT:

14. (SBU) In withholding information about the H5N2 virus for nearly two months, the COA acted at variance with the basic tenets of the OIE, which requires transparency in public notification of such an event. While COA officials claim they were cautious about releasing data on the H5N2 outbreak because there was no conclusive evidence of the pathogenicity of the virus, the public only found out when the news media

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broke the story. COA wanted to protect Taiwan's poultry industry and had concerns about paying an indemnity to producers. This strategy lowered public trust in COA's ability to protect the public interest, and proved unable to avert serious economic consequences for the Taiwan poultry industry. END COMMENT
SYOUNG